

**58. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY THE CHAIR (PART 1)  
- CONSULTATION TASK FORCES**

The Chair confirmed that he had approved this matter being raised as an item of urgent business. Councillor P Davies referred to the various Consultation Task Forces, which had been set up to assist the Council in formulating a consultation document with a view to achieving budgetary savings. He suggested that the Council's normal structures appeared to have been bypassed through the appointment of Independent Task Forces, which then acted outside the normal range of Council meetings and procedures. He expressed particular concern that

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- The Task Forces were presented with budgetary information on the services they were considering, without those papers being presented either to the Cabinet or to this Committee, where the information could have been questioned.
- No information had been given on the appointment of the members of the Task Forces and the way in which they were selected.
- It was unclear whether or not there was a register of interests of those individuals sitting on the Task Forces, or whether there was any procedure for a declaration of interest on any items discussed.
- The consultation procedure, including the way in which Task Forces would be used, was announced in a press release, and not through the Cabinet, where it could have been called in to this Committee for further examination.
- The questionnaire for public consultation that was drawn up following the initial Task Force meetings was not taken to Cabinet as a draft, which would have allowed it to be questioned or called in to this Committee for further examination.
- The questionnaire itself is fundamentally flawed, for example, in failing to provide any comparative costings, in failing to provide complete lists of alternatives, including the provision of services by the Council, and in failing to make it clear to the public whether questions about the provision of alternative services from the voluntary sector refers to the Council commissioning services or actually stopping services and hoping the voluntary sector will fill the gap without any extra resources.
- The way in which the subsequent public consultation would be carried out was again announced in a press release, stating the timetable of events, and was not subject to question or scrutiny either from Cabinet or this Committee, which is specifically charged with scrutinising both community engagement issues and issues around public relations.
- It has been made clear that this process, which has not been open to democratic scrutiny, will actually be used to inform Wirral's budget setting.

A member commented that the Task Forces were open to the public and any Councillor could have attended had they wished to do so. In addition, there remained an opportunity to call in any decision of the Cabinet in relation to budgetary savings arising from public consultation. Other Members indicated that

they had not seen any public notices as to when or where the Task Forces were to have been held and expressed the view that notice of them should have been given to all Members of the Council.

It was moved by Councillor P Gilchrist and seconded by Councillor P Davies –

“That the matters identified by Councillor Davies in relation to the Task Forces be considered at the special meeting of the Committee to be held on 28 October 2010 and that the officers be requested to provide such information to that meeting as they are able to, both in relation to the process followed in the selection and appointment of Task Force members, and the budgetary implications of the questions contained within the public questionnaire.”

It was moved as an amendment by Councillor J Keeley and seconded by Councillor D McCubbin –

“That the information requested be presented to the Committee as part of a full de-brief in December/January, once the outcome of the consultation process is known.”

The amendment was put and lost (4:6)

The Motion was put and carried (6:4)

**Resolved (6:4) – That the matters identified by Councillor Davies in relation to the Task Forces be considered at the special meeting of the Committee to be held on 28 October 2010 and that the officers be requested to provide such information to that meeting as they are able to, both in relation to the process followed in the selection and appointment of Task Force members, and the budgetary implications of the questions contained within the public questionnaire.**